

message

from the Assistant Secretary



It is my pleasure to present the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Children's Administration seventh Annual Performance Report.

As the newly appointed Assistant Secretary for the Children's Administration, I am both humbled and hopeful to be a part of an administration that performs vital work in our community. I am humbled to be charged with carrying on the legacy left by my predecessor, Rosie Oreskovich; a woman who cared deeply about children and was unwavering in her commitment. I am hopeful because as I have traveled the state, spending time with field staff and meeting personally with stakeholders, I have observed that same kind of caring and commitment at every level of the administration and throughout the state.

It is a direct result of the passion and dedication demonstrated by CA personnel that the administration made significant progress in fiscal year 2003 toward improving outcomes for children and families.

- Fewer families than ever met the criteria for chronic abuse indicating that we are improving our methods for keeping children safe and supporting families.
- Children for whom reunification was a safe and viable plan, were reunited with their families within one year in 83 percent of the cases, well exceeding the national standard.
- More children than ever who could not return home were successfully placed with relatives, preserving powerful family ties.
- More children were adopted than at any time in our history.
- Headquarters and seven field offices met the rigorous best practice standards in a public child welfare organization, receiving accreditation by *The International Office on Accreditation of Services for Families and Children, Inc.*

While the Children's Administration has done much to improve the quality of life for children and families, we still have much work to do.

- We must develop strategies to improve practice consistency throughout Washington while maintaining the flexibility needed to provide culturally competent, community-based services.
- We must continue to identify innovative ways of recruiting, retaining and supporting quality foster homes.
- We must improve service integration through increased collaboration with our community partners particularly in the areas of mental health treatment for children, substance abuse treatment for families and Community Child Protection Teams.
- We must increase our ability to utilize outcome data toward improving practice.
- We must recognize that our long serving workforce is retiring at an increasing rate and we have to make sure that there is a whole new generation of child welfare professionals who will not rest until our children are grown.
- We must work toward decreasing the disproportionality of minority children in long-term care.

As we work together toward better practice and better outcomes, we will assess ourselves and subject ourselves to external evaluation in an effort to monitor our progress and we will provide updates about our progress via Websites and publications.

I am also honored to work among those who strive to keep children safe and families intact. I recognize that while all of us work very hard and each of us fulfills a vital role, it is the worker in the field who must make tough decisions at a moment's notice about the life of a vulnerable child who has the hardest job in the administration. It is a privilege to be a part of their lifesaving, life-enhancing work.

I urge all the readers of this report to join the Children's Administration in continuing to make important contributions to improving the lives of children and families.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Uma Ahluwalia".

Uma Ahluwalia, MSW, MHA
Assistant Secretary